The Connection between TB and HIV (the AIDS virus)

People infected with HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) are more likely to get other infections and diseases, as well. Tuberculosis (TB) is one of these diseases.

What is tuberculosis (TB)?

TB is an infectious disease that is spread from person to person through the air. TB usually affects the lungs. The germs are put into the air when a person with TB of the lungs coughs, sneezes, laughs or sings. TB can also affect other parts of the body, such as the brain or the spine.

General symptoms of TB may include:

- weakness
- feeling sick
- weight loss
- fever
- night sweats

Common symptoms of TB of the lungs may include:

- long term cough
- chest pain
- coughing up blood

Other symptoms depend on the particular part of the body that is affected.
TB infection may be spread to other people who share the same breathing space (such as family members, friends, coworkers, roommates) with someone who has TB disease.

Why is it important to know if I have TB and HIV infections?
People who get TB disease get TB infection first. A person can have TB infection for years without any signs of disease. But if that person's immune system gets weak, the infection can activate and become TB disease.
Because HIV infection weakens the immune system, someone with TB infection and HIV infection has a very high risk of getting TB disease. Without treatment, these two infections can work together to shorten the life of the person infected with both.

Good News!
The good news is that people with TB infection can be prevented from developing TB disease and people with TB disease can be cured. The first step is to find out if you are infected with the TB germ. You can do this by getting a TB skin test.

What is a TB skin test?
A small needle is used to put some testing material, called tuberculin, into the upper layers of the skin. This is usually done on the inside of the forearm. The person getting the test must return in 48 to 72 hours to have the test read by a nurse or doctor. If there is a reaction on the arm, the size of the reaction is measured. A positive reaction means that you probably have TB infection.

Some people who are infected with both HIV and TB germs will not react to the TB skin test. This is because the immune system is not working properly. Anyone who is HIV infected and has a negative skin test should also have other medical tests, if they have symptoms of TB disease.

What must I do if I have TB infection?

Get required follow-up tests. This will include a chest x-ray and maybe some other tests as well. If these tests show that you have active TB disease, the doctor will give you medicine that can cure TB. If the germs are still in the infection stage, you will probably be given medicine to keep you from coming down with TB disease.

Follow your doctor's advice and take medication as prescribed. It is especially important for people with both TB and HIV infections to take their TB medication.

The HIV-weakened immune system makes it more likely for them to develop TB disease than people who are not HIV infected.

TB is one of the few diseases related to HIV infection that is easily prevented and cured with medication.

To get a TB skin test, contact your doctor or local health department. FIND OUT IF YOU ARE INFECTED!

For further information on HIV: Call 1-800-342-AIDS or 1-800-344-7432 for Spanish speaking or 1-800-243-7889 (TTY) for deaf persons.

Last Reviewed : August 14, 2002
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Please send comments/suggestions/requests to: tbinfo@cdc.gov